



*Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on
Aging Representing:
Agency on Aging of South Central CT
North Central Area Agency on Aging
Western CT Area Agency on Aging
Senior Resources - Agency on Aging Eastern CT
Southwestern CT Agency on Aging*

**To: Honorable Representative Claire Janowski, Co-chairperson and
Honorable Senator Robert Duff, Co-chairperson and Members of the
Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee**

DT: Submitted February 19, 2015

**RE: Nomination of Elizabeth Ritter for Commissioner, State of CT
Department on Aging**

The CT Association of Area Agencies on Aging wholeheartedly endorses the nomination of Elizabeth, "Betsy", Ritter to the position of Commissioner for the State Department on Aging. A former legislator, Ms. Ritter will help align the departmental resources with the needs of the fast-growing older population of Connecticut citizens whom you represent.

In a recent meeting with the Executive Directors of C4A, Ms. Ritter spoke about increasing the visibility of the State Department on Aging. Here in the 7th oldest state in the union, Ms. Ritter understands that the Department is at a critical time in its history. Rebalancing efforts of the second largest budget line item, Medicaid, are paramount to the State's success in achieving a high quality of life while containing costs related to an aging population. A thoughtful, strategic marriage of Older Americans Act funds and State match will provide support to necessary services such as nutrition programs, transportation programs, legal assistance, and in-home care. The Area Agencies on Aging, in partnership with the State Department on Aging, are responsible for the regional allocation of federal dollars to ensure that local needs are being met in accordance with the Act. Betsy Ritter is a partner, a collaborator, and an advocate who understands both the federal hurdles and the State's legislative process. She can help contain State funds by maximizing the effect of federal dollars in order to support older adults wishing to remain in their communities. Commissioner Ritter suggested

collaboration and cooperation among partners and ensuring that the Elder Network has the tools it needs to function in this challenging environment. With her background in finance, Commissioner Ritter will bring considerable acumen to the role designed to compliment, not duplicate, the State's programs and funds. The State Department on Aging is the state's flagship agency whose mission is to empower older adults to live full independent lives, and to provide leadership on aging issues on behalf of older adults, families, caregivers, and advocates. Never has this mission been more important than at a time where we see unprecedented growth in the 60+ population. C4A believes that Commissioner Ritter will uphold this mission and will be the standard bearer to which we will all aspire.

Much of the Governor's budget relies on successful rebalancing of Medicaid spending. The Older Americans Act provides funding that can be aligned with these initiatives. It will take a facile leader to work with the Department of Social Services and initiate changes in long-standing federal programs to address the barriers that have prevented this alignment. The Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging are confident that Commissioner Ritter has both the skill and the tenacity to guide Connecticut through this major systems change. Commissioner Ritter's finance background will add clarity and realistic expectations to the value propositions presumed by increasing cost sharing and denying access to community-based care for Connecticut's aging population. This is significantly important considering that Connecticut's Long Term Care Study indicates that 80% of the older population have voiced their preference for staying at home.

The CHOICES program, stewarded by the State Department of Aging has saved Connecticut residents hundreds of thousands of dollars by identifying the most beneficial Medicare prescription drug policies and enrolling residents in the federal Medicare Savings Program. The work performed by CHOICES helps older adults maintain a portion of their discretionary budget, which in turn is invested in Connecticut's economy.

The Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on Aging stands at the ready to work closely with the new Commissioner to ensure the services meet the needs of Connecticut's older population. Our joint focus will be to promote programs that explore

all possible private and federal funding sources so that Connecticut is hailed as a leader in maintaining the dignity of its older citizens while initiating cost efficient, innovative and comprehensive community-based programs.

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